


TRICARE Fundamentals Course

Module 14


Customer Service

Participant Guide


Module Objectives




Module Objectives



- Provide a clear statement of customer service philosophy
- Identify barriers to effective listening during customer interactions
- Demonstrate effective listening techniques for customer interactions
- Identify ways to build rapport with customers




Module Objectives




- Evaluate voice qualities (volume, tone, pace, diction) and describe customer reactions to variations to each aspect of voice quality
- Identify personality and attitude through body language
- Identify aspects of customer interaction over the phone
- Identify responses for handling difficult customer behaviors

Customer Service

- The customer is not always right...but the customer is always the customer:
 - This fundamental attitude is the beginning of success in customer service at any level, in any industry.
 - The goal is a positive outcome to every interaction—every communication.



Customer Service




**Excellent customer service
is the ability of an organization
to constantly and consistently
exceed the customer's
expectations.**

Listening Skills Pre-test


- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 9. |
| 2. | 10. |
| 3. | 11. |
| 4. | 12. |
| 5. | 13. |
| 6. | 14. |
| 7. | 15. |
| 8. | 16. |

Listening Skills

Barriers to Effective Listening



Listening Barriers



- **Background noise**
- **Gadgets while-u-wait**
- **Talking speed**
- **Too many notes**
- **Listening “filters”**
- **Acronyms**

- Background noise
 - Noise surrounds us—faxes, ringing phones, tidbits of passing conversation, piped-in music, traffic in the street and the hallway.
 - Noise can drown out the tiniest word like “not,” resulting in your hearing a totally different message.
- Gadgets while-u-wait
 - Sometimes, gadgets and technology get in the way of listening intently to our customers.
 - Our minds focus on punching in the right computer key or reading the notes on the screen rather than on what the customer is saying.
 - Sometimes the best choice is to talk, then do. Or do, then talk. Not both at the same time.
- Talking speed
 - Some customers talk too fast. The average talking speed is 140 to 160 words per minute, but we all know people who talk with gusts of up to 400 words per minute.
 - Never be afraid to ask customers politely to slow down their speech “so that you can understand completely.” Phrasing, in this case, is everything.

- Too many notes
 - Trying to take too many notes can also be distracting.
 - Since you probably can't write fast enough to record everything; don't even try.
 - Listen carefully, jotting down only key facts, names, dates, or numbers.
 - Then after the conversation, note only a summary of the key points.
 - Too many notes can keep you from hearing the message.
- Listening "filters"
 - We tend to hear what we want to hear or expect to hear and tend to ignore what we don't want to hear.
 - For example, many people hear "I'll try to be home for dinner at 7p.m." and translate it "I'll be home for dinner at 7p.m." Other people hear an elderly woman shabbily dressed say, "I'd like to buy a ticket" and automatically translate that to mean "she wants the lowest price ticket available." Be aware of such filters or attitudes that affect your own listening.
- Acronyms
 - For words and phrases we use daily we tend to use acronyms.
 - Our customers may not be familiar with these acronyms and feel lost by the message you are trying to convey.
 - Be aware of acronyms and make an effort to avoid them.



Listening Barriers



- **Criticism of delivery**
- **Interruptions**
- **Assumptions**
- **Labeling**
- **Defensiveness**
- **Conversational stoppers**

- Criticism of delivery
 - Other people miss what a customer says because they focus too strongly on how the customer is speaking.
 - For example, they focus on the accent, the slang terms used, mispronunciation of words, or the stammering sentence pattern and stumble over the real message.


- Interruptions
 - Another barrier to listening is constant interruptions.
 - Some interruptions may be preventable; others are not. A colleague may continually interrupt your conversation with a customer to ask questions about another situation. A telephone call interrupts. A friend yelling to you from the hallway interrupts.
 - All these interruptions may make the customer feel unimportant and cause you to miss important feelings and body language that alter the meaning of your customer's actual words.
- Assumptions
 - Assumptions also play a role in many misunderstandings.
 - You may have heard a general inquiry so many times that you assume all the particulars about a case without really hearing why a customer is asking for help.
- Labeling
 - Closely related to false assumptions is the habit of labeling what you see/hear.
 - Labels—yours or those offered to you by colleagues—may limit your thinking so that you don't understand or see the complete situation or need.
- Defensiveness
 - Another big barrier to listening for a complete message is defensiveness.
 - A defensive reaction to what the customer is saying causes us to tune out many of the details, especially when customers attack you personally.
 - A typical reaction is to challenge what they're saying.
 - If customers' remarks are lengthy, sometimes you begin to plan an entire response while you're waiting for them to finish speaking.
 - If while a customer is speaking, your mind is screaming "wrong, wrong, wrong!" you will not hear the entire message.
 - Your defensiveness will block other key facts and feelings that you'll need to respond to so that you can sort out the situation.
- Conversational stoppers
 - The worst ending to such a negative situation would be to deliver a conversational "stopper."
 - That is not to say that stoppers will end a conversation, but that they will end the conversation prematurely—before you've had the opportunity to gather all the facts, investigate all the alternatives, and solve the problem.
 - Stoppers include words and statements that stop the speaker immediately:
 - "That's not true."
 - "You're wrong."
 - "Someone told you incorrectly."
 - "You can't do that."

Barriers to Effective Listening


Video Segment	Barrier
Segment A	Conversational “stoppers”
Segment B	Defensiveness
Segment C	Gadgets while-u-wait
Segment D	Talking Speed
Segment E	Interruptions
Segment F	Background noise
Segment G	Listening “filters”
Segment H	Too many notes
Segment I	Assumptions
Segment J	Labels
Segment K	Criticism of delivery

Building Rapport

- Use names
 - Survey after survey shows that the single most important thing you can do to build relationships is to use a customer's name.
 - An individual's name is music to his or her ears.
 - Keep in mind that being a military organization, we must remain cognizant of proper protocol regarding rank.
 - It is appropriate to refer to a beneficiary by rank followed by his or her last name. For example, "Good morning Colonel Jones; Sergeant Davis, please come forward."
- Avoid jargon
 - Jargon is a form of shorthand for those familiar with terms, procedures, policies, documents, and equipment.
 - Many people are so caught up in the lingo of their industry that they don't realize that they're not communicating with such jargon-filled statements and explanations.
 - Jargon irritates those who don't understand it.
 - The customer isn't always right, especially when it comes to using your products and services in the way they were designed.
 - Customers create their own problems sometimes with the help of service representatives.
 - That is, many times when customers approach you with a problem, they don't fully understand the product or service we provide.
 - But you can't blame customers for not knowing all about our products and services.
 - Familiarizing customers about how to use our products and services is our responsibility.
 - You, as a service representative, are a customer's main source of "help" and information
 - Accept that task as a big part of providing effective customer service.
 - Learn to give instructions willingly, clearly, and logically.
 - Even though you may have given the same set of instructions 82 times in any given day, your current customer has heard the instructions only once.




The 3 C's



The 3 C's of Cheerful Communication

- *Be Clear*
- *Be concise, but not curt*
- *Be complete*



- Respond to personal comments
 - When customers share personal information within your hearing, you can assume they want you to hear it.
 - They may make comments like, “My father has just had a heart attack. I need to get all this paperwork taken care of for him because he’s unable to do it himself.”
 - To ignore such comments with no response at all means to a customer, “Don’t bother me; I don’t care.”
 - React to such personal shared comments with an appropriate response that lets customers know you have heard and that you identify with the feeling or situation.
- Avoid being overly familiar
 - There’s a fine line between responding to personal comments shared by customers and being familiar in responding with a remark inappropriate for the business relationship.
 - For example, if a customer mentions a death in the family, you don’t want to respond with something so personal as to bring on tears.
 - Even habits such as calling all customers by their first name or dropping titles such as “Mr.” or “Dr.” may offend customers who consider your interaction a business, rather than a personal, transaction.

- Agree selectively
 - People like others to agree with them.
 - Find something about a situation or a comment with which you can agree.
 - Obviously, if a customer says, “The directions are ridiculous—you are totally incompetent,” you can’t agree with the statement that you are incompetent.
 - But you may agree that the directions are confusing to many people.
 - Rather than clash with a customer’s statement, look for some part of a comment to respond to positively.
 - Affirm that customer by agreeing with that limited part of the comment, even if it is an implied statement or feeling.
- Empathize
 - Customers want to know that you identify with their feelings.
 - They need a personal response from you.
 - Look for ways to show or state you understand their needs, frustrations, or disappointments.
- Avoid discounting. Customers feel discounted when you do the following:
 - Ignore them, their feelings, or their comments.
 - Reject, put down, or question what they say as if you consider it incorrect.
 - Give a judgmental, sarcastic, or flippant response to what they considered a serious issue.
 - “Over-explain” or act impatient as if they are stupid.
 - Treat them as children in need of constant supervision.
 - Reject a compliment rather than accept it.
 - Instead, respond to feelings and facts offered.
 - Assume customers are telling the truth.
 - Give a serious, nonjudgmental response to a serious issue or question.
 - Take your cue from them about how much explanation they want or need.
 - Avoid treating them as children with constant orders and reminders about what they can and can’t do.
 - And finally, accept compliments in the spirit they’re offered.
 - To do otherwise implies that the customer was foolish or off base in offering the compliment.
- Accept responsibility, don’t blame or complain
 - Nothing spoils communication with customers faster than having customers tell you about a situation which you then indicate is not your responsibility or worse, you blame or complain about others.

- Explain, give status reports, and follow through
 - Many customer complaints revolve around the frustration of not knowing what's happening behind the scenes.
 - And it doesn't take a customer long to grow uncomfortable with a wait even if left holding on the telephone for only a few moments while someone "checks on something."
 - Customers cannot see the action going on to solve their problems; that leads them to fear that nothing is going on to solve their problems or needs.
 - Aim to keep your customer informed every step of the way.
 - Explain what actions you are taking or planning to take.
 - Give status reports when the action takes longer than routine.
 - Follow up to see that your coworkers have completed all promised action to the customer.
 - Make sure that your customer considers the transaction completed.
- Control the interaction without giving orders
 - Yes, time is money. Customers, as well as your own management, want you to be aware of time and productivity.
 - Customers become victims when they have to stand by silently and wait their turn while watching service providers act helpless in complex or disappointing situations.
 - Customers want you to spend as much time as necessary to help them transact their business, but not to waste their time in the process.
 - They expect you to know your own process and to lead them through it efficiently.
 - They also expect that you know enough about handling people not to let one or two difficult customers waste everyone's time.
 - And if they're the customer with a problem, they don't like to be shoved to the side as if they themselves are the problem that is holding everybody else up.
 - You, as the service representative, have to control the interaction without controlling people.
 - In other words, you want to be efficient without sounding like a drill sergeant or even a well-meaning parent.
 - Yes, lead your customers through the necessary action steps, but try to avoid giving orders like these: "Stand there." "Wait a moment." "Take these forms to the service rep at the next station." "Sign in."
 - Instead, try wording such directions with courtesy words and in question form: "If you'll stand on the white line, someone will come by in a few minutes." "Would you please wait a moment?" "A service rep at the next counter will help you with those forms. Would you please step over there?"

Controlling Your Voice: Tone, Volume, Pace, Quality

You've heard it often: "How you say it is as important as what you say." Your voice may be your biggest asset or your biggest liability. As much as 38 percent of your overall impact with customers comes from your voice. When customers communicate with you over the phone, without ever seeing you, as much as 82 percent of your total impact comes from your voice.

- Think of your voice from four perspectives:
 - Tone (harsh, timid, haughty, compassionate, whiny)
 - Volume (loudness and softness)
 - Pace (how fast or slow you talk)
 - Quality (characteristics such as a nasal tone, a high or low pitch, a raspy sound, hesitancy and timidity in tone)

Customers often mentally sketch a complete picture of someone's confidence and competency by the sound of their voice. Make sure you're painting the appropriate picture for your organization.

Body Language

Service Providers	Attitude or Personality	Body Language That Creates Impression
Rep #1		
Rep #2		
Rep #3		

Telephone Tactics

- Smile when you answer
 - Does your body language “translate” over the phone? Certainly. Customers can hear a smile. When you smile, your voice takes on a more energetic, upbeat tone.
- Identify yourself
 - Give your name, your department or job function, and/or company name.
 - Give enough information so that callers know they have the right person before they elaborate on the reason for their call, but don’t give such a long identification that customers grow tired of hearing it.
 - And unless you have a reason for withholding your last name (such as confidentiality), giving both your first and last name makes you sound more authoritative to the customer. You want to inspire trust in your callers that you can help them with their requests.
 - Customers have a fear of receiving incorrect information from an anonymous source, hiding behind a first name, who will be unavailable should they need to make contact again.
- Leave a specific, up-to-date taped greeting when you’re away
 - We’ve all heard voice-mail global greetings such as, “This is Jeff Turner. I’m either away from my desk or out of the office. Please leave a complete message and I’ll get back to you as soon as possible.” The typical response is, “Where is he—at the water fountain or in Tahiti? When will he call back—in the next half hour or when he returns from vacation in three weeks?” Leaving a specific, up-to-date greeting is both courteous and efficient.
- Be prepared with a pen, paper, and records.
 - Place writing tools and any necessary forms or information sheets next to all phones where you might answer a call. Nothing shouts “Inefficiency!” like having to ask a caller to wait or repeat while you scrounge for a pencil.
- Take a complete message.
 - Record a summary of what the caller said or asked, what it means or relates to, when the call came in and when and if you promised a call-back, and any pertinent information about how, where, or when to reach the person on the call-back. Your coworkers may have to depend on your accuracy to complete the customer transaction
- Leave a complete message.
 - Why waste both your time and the other person’s time by leaving only your name and phone number? If the called person has some information you need or needs to answer a question for you, you will both save time if the called person has the needed information at this or her fingertips when returning the call. Otherwise, you’re almost sure to be caught in a second call-back loop.

- Verify numbers, dates, and names (add a phonetic spelling, if necessary).
 - Customers want you to get their information right. If you don't think it bothers them or someone to mispronounce their name, say it incorrectly and notice how fast they correct you. Transposing numbers is a common mistake, so prevent the customers from being lost in never-never land by verifying all phone numbers, addresses, order numbers, or file numbers.
- Transfer the caller to the right person.
 - We've all called businesses where we've been bounced from person to person with lines like, "I don't know who handles that—why don't you try ext. 3345" or "Do we sell those? That must be the Atlanta office. I'll transfer you." Instead, listen or question callers long enough to find out exactly what they need and then verify the appropriate person who can help before making the transfer yourself or referring them to another number.
- Pass on complete information with a transferred call
 - Don't make customers "tell their story" several times before getting to the right person. When you transfer a call, transfer a summary of the situation and the customer's request.
 - Take responsibility for the call until...
 - When you transfer a caller, stay on the line until you make sure the other person can help the caller. Always give the caller the extension number to which you're transferring in case the caller is inadvertently disconnected. If you simply hand off the call to a coworker in your area, make sure to follow up on the call to verify that the customer did get the information needed or the problem resolved.
- Ask, don't demand, that callers hold.
 - "Please hold," click, is no way to greet a caller. Instead, ask, "Would you please hold for a moment?" and then wait until the caller agrees to hold. If the caller states he or she cannot hold, take a message and call back immediately after you hang up on the other line or finish the transaction.
- Ask if callers prefer a call-back if the wait time will be long.
 - If the wait will be longer than a moment or two, ask the caller about his or her preference. "I'll need to pull your records up on the screen and verify the prices quoted. That may take several minutes—would you prefer to hold or have me call back?" And then honor the customer's preference.
- Return to "holding" callers every thirty seconds.
 - Thirty seconds can seem like an eternity when you're holding on the other end of the line and can't see what the other person is doing. Be alert to passing time and return to the line about every 15-30 seconds: "Are you able to continue holding?" "I'm still checking—I'll have the information in front of me momentarily." "This is taking longer than I expected. Would you prefer that I call you back?"


- Give your undivided attention.
 - Fumbling with paperwork, punching computer entries from the last transaction, eating your lunch, hand-signaling to a coworker—all these distractions can be heard over the telephone. How? You'll miss key details, have to ask the caller to repeat information, transpose numbers, or otherwise have difficulty following what the customer is saying. Customers notice inattention.
- Signal that you're listening.
 - When customers explain in detail, they want to know you're listening. After all, that's one of the disadvantages of dealing with customers over the telephone—they're not sure you're paying attention because they can't see your facial expressions and show of concern. So as customers talk, you need to give them feedback and signal that you're still listening: "Yes, certainly." "Okay," "So then you..." "That's too bad." "Then what happened?" Remember that customers can't see head-nodding over the phone.
- Eliminate distracting background noises.
 - Nothing is more irritating to a customer than to hear smacking gum, slurping, side conversations, or other noises in the background. Although you may be straining to shut out the noise and hear what your customers have to say, your customers can't see that effort on your part. They often can only imagine that you are somehow involved in that noise rather than in their conversation.
- Explain why you're leaving the phone in the middle of a conversation.
 - When you're standing behind a customer counter and turn to retrieve some paperwork in the file, your customer can see what you're doing and knows you're working on the problem. On the phone, however, customers have to guess. Don't make them. Always explain: "Would you wait a moment—I want to verify those dates on your friend's itinerary." If you can hold a moment, I want to ask my colleague if she has further information on these charges." "As soon as I handle the other call on hold, I'll pull the manuals off the shelf and verify these requirements. I'll call you back within ten minutes."
- Call back when you say you will.
 - Nothing impresses customers as much as doing what you say you will when you say you will. If you promise a customer a call-back on Tuesday morning, call back Tuesday morning—not Tuesday afternoon. Your reputation rests on reliability.

- Give progress reports.
 - Some service providers mistakenly think that if they don't have all the information or answers at hand, they shouldn't "bother" the customer. Wrong. Customers feel better when they know that you're at least working on the problem—even if you don't yet have definitive answers or information. When customers are concerned, no news is not good news. Instead give brief progress reports such as these: "I'm calling back to let you know I'm still working on the best itinerary for your trip to Canada. I have two other tour companies I'm investigating and then I'll have all the options to present to you." Or: "I just wanted you to know that we're still waiting for Mr. Ford to return to the office to okay your making these changes in the plans. We're expecting him before 3:00." "I phoned to let you know that we put the contracts in the mail this morning. You should have them by Friday." Or: I'm still trying to schedule your appointment this week, but I've been unable to reach Ms. Streistan. I'll be back in touch as soon as I have something definite."
- Control the call with effective openings and closings.
 - Customers at times get bogged down in details, trying to give you too much background information before they get into the current situation or problem. Or, at times, even after you've finished a transaction, they may continue to repeat their predicament, their future plans, or their birthday plans. As a busy representative who doesn't want to make other customers wait, you will need to control your calls. Specifically, you will need to use prepared opening lines to help your customers give you the appropriate information and prepared closing lines to help customers end their transactions. Be thorough, courteous, and quick.


Coping with Difficult Customers

Passive/Unresponsive/Non-vocal	Know-it-all
Irate	Verbally abusive
Physically threatening	Dishonest
Pseudo-helpless	Flirt
Demanding	Complainer
Confused	Others


Summary




Module Objectives



- Provide a clear statement of customer service philosophy
- Identify barriers to effective listening during customer interactions
- Demonstrate effective listening techniques for customer interactions
- Identify ways to build rapport with customers



Module Objectives



- Evaluate voice qualities (volume, tone, pace, diction) and describe customer reactions to variations to each aspect of voice quality
- Identify personality and attitude through body language
- Identify aspects of customer interaction over the phone
- Identify responses for handling difficult customer behaviors

Wrap Up

Customer service is a daily journey. Our customers are more informed and educated on our services than customers of years past. They want world-class products and services. They want it all, and they want it now. If we can't provide what they want, they will find someone who can. It is equally important for all staff members to keep their customer service toolkit fully packed with essential tools for success. The tools and tips we have discussed throughout this course are a great start for creating your toolkit and can be used in your daily customer service interactions.

Customer loyalty is a myth formed in the mist of our distant past. The days of "They will come back" are gone. Our beneficiaries can now shop with their feet by choosing the location to receive care. The element of "choice" has changed the sheer nature of our business. We must be closer to our customers now than ever. "We must provide exceptional customer service."

If we don't, someone else will!